

THE FACE OF ROSENTEL.

HARLES HOWARD MONTAGUE.

Two volumes of the "Face of Rosentel" are for sale at the publisher's price of \$1.00 per volume.

CHAPTER XX.

MAN AND MISTRESS.

Maxey and Dr. Lamar exchanged looks of alarm.

"What is this?" the artist whispered. Lamar answered:

"Death!"

"So suddenly? Is it possible?"

"I do not mean that he is dead, but that he has not long to live. I would not give a pinch of snuff for his chances."

"What are we to do?"

"Better take him to the hospital at once. It will not harm him to move him. He cannot remain here. He will not be long in that swoon, and then he may be violent. Let me call the janitor and have a carriage brought."

Lamar stepped to the entrance, which communicated directly with the outer corridor. In a twinkling he had turned the key and opened the door.

A man who had been standing suspiciously near the threshold drew back in consternation.

This man was respectfully dressed. His coat was buttoned up about his neck and his hat drawn down over his eyes. He looked like a well-to-do coachman.

The instant he saw Lamar he put up his hand as if to shield his face and turned to run.

The physician was too quick for him. In two strides he had come up with him.

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Way shown through the opposite windows and dimly illuminated the interior.

Lamar saw a woman closely veiled. She was reclining in a corner, but when the door opened she started forward and ejaculated in a tremulous voice:

"John!"

Dr. Lamar knew that voice. A shiver went through him. There was a dull feeling at his heart. He did not utter a word. He did not move a muscle. There was a dead silence.

The veiled figure shrank back with an instinctive fear, and the light from the street lamp fell upon his face. A piercing scream came from behind the veil.

The figure sat quite motionless upon the seat.

"Fostelle!" said Lamar in a low tone.

Maxey answered the knock at the door instantly. The doctor was very pale, but he was perfectly calm.

"Where have you been so long?" cried the artist.

"Bidding goodbye to an old friend," was the solemn response. "Maxey, let this man go. There is nothing at all against him."

Dr. Lamar turned to the coachman and added in a low voice, "Go, John, and drive your mistress home."

When an officious personage, who would not tell the servant his business, called at Mrs. Forsythe's house the next morning, he found the place in confusion. After some persistence he was shown into the presence of the housekeeper, of whom he desired to learn when he should call again.

"Not at all," returned the housekeeper coldly. "Madam has gone away on a long visit. She sat up all night making arrangements for the settlement of her affairs here. The furniture is to be stored, and all the servants have been given a month's pay. The house will positively be closed."

There was another person in the city who went quietly to bed overnight, but who in the morning could not be found. It was the pretty Miss Stevenson.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE POWER OF WORK.

One afternoon Maxey sought a private audience with his wife.

"Annette, dear, I want you to tell me something."

"Is it something about this mysterious affair that everybody has been so absorbed in of late? The house for the last few days has been full of 'hush,' 'don't question me,' 'all in good time,' and other such exasperating answers, until I am quite resigned never to be curious again. Is it about this?"

"Perhaps, little one. Who can tell? It is about that fancy portrait that you sketched. I want you to tell me all about the origin and development of that idea."

At the mention of the portrait Mrs. Maxey became visibly distressed.

"Has Dr. Lamar influenced you to ask me that, Julian?"

Maxey averted his glance.

"Why, no, dear; only it was a very strange picture for a young girl, for you know you are only a girl yet, Annette. I want to be sure that it is not something you once saw and forgot."

"Saw? In the flesh do you mean?"

Maxey started and looked at his young wife with a troubled glance.

"That is a strange question, Annette. Nevertheless she was very grave and earnest in what she said. She continued in a tremulous voice:

"My husband, do you believe in apparitions?"

"Annette!"

"Do you want your wife to believe in them?"

"Of course I don't."

"Then do not question me."

"This introduction is highly calculated to allay a man's curiosity. In the name of goodness, Annette, what do you mean? How is the mere fact of my questioning you going to cause you to believe in anything?"

"Because it will cause me to think of a dangerous subject. Oh, dear, I wish I had never touched that picture. It was so foolish of me! I might have known it would have led to this. But the idea fascinated me so after it occurred to me that I was almost forced to it. Julian, do you desire it very, very much?"

She looked at him wistfully, as if she fondly dared to hope that he would take pity on her manifest distress and say no.

But he was immovable.

"I not only desire it very much, but I consider it of extreme importance to the happiness of us both that you answer me fully and freely."

"And when I have done so you will never refer to it again!"

"I promise you, Annette, never."

He sealed his promise with a kiss.

The young wife clasped her arms about her husband's neck and said to him:

"Then, Julian, dear, I will open my whole heart to you. For you to understand my thoughts and feelings on this subject I must tell about you ought to know a little episode in my childhood."

My mother, Mrs. Dye, was an intelligent and thinking woman, little given to superstitions of any sort, and she was very particular that I should not grow up with any silly notions about such subjects in my head. But one time,

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Maxey averted his glance.

came interested in a book on spiritualism, which she picked up in a second-hand book store. She did not tell me that she thought and felt in the matter, I am very sure, but I could plainly observe a gradual alteration in her ways and looks, and one day she nearly frightened me to death by going into what I afterward found was called the trance state. First she became rigid and then spasmodic, and at last she began to talk in unnatural voices. I was utterly unable to recognize my mother, and I was so terrified that I ran out for a doctor. Fortunately the physician was a kind, sympathetic man. Instead of laughing at my alarm, he not only quieted my fears for the time and somewhat explained the matter to me, but he gave me words of caution and advice for the future which I have never forgotten:

"If you don't wish your mother to frighten you this way again, see that she reads no more of the sort of literature she has indulged in lately and that she goes to no more sittings. I have questioned her, and from what she tells me, together with her evident temperamental and present health, I find that this sensitive, if not dangerous, condition into which she has brought herself is owing entirely to an unhealthy brooding on one subject. 'Surely you can give her some medicine, then,' I said to him, 'that will cure her.' 'No, my dear girl,' he replied, 'this matter is beyond medicine. She thinks the world of you. You can restore her to health better than any one else. Try to interest her in other things. Once get her mind out of its present unhealthy rut of thought, and you will have no more trouble. These things are entirely nervous in their origin. The only way to cure them is by allaying the excitement.' In the end I found the physician had told the truth. As long as my mother continued to be excited about and interested in 'Spiritualistic Manifestation' she was liable to the trance. But when, by my aid and her own determined efforts, she had accustomed herself to think of other things the trances left her and never returned. Julian, dear, I suppose you will say it is silly and girlish, but I have an uncontrollable horror and dread of these things. They frighten me. I could conceive of no worse fate than to replace the sunshine of my life with the darkness and gloom of a mind tortured by such specters, and my fear is greater because I fancy I am predisposed to such things."

"That is a morbid fancy, little wife, growing, I fear, out of your unfortunately solitary and lonely childhood. A few years of bird song and blue sky will cure you. Something has occurred to you of late, dear, to remind you of all this. Go on. Don't be afraid to tell me."

"Yes, Julian, something did happen to me. I don't know why it was. Perhaps my head was weak from my sickness. But in the first days of my recovery, as I lay there listlessly on the bed, I frequently fell into trance-like states. I have found out since that by resisting the feeling when it first approaches I can break the spell, but I was too weak and lacking in determination then. This grew upon me, and I became frightened. I remembered what the doctor had told me about my mother, and by forcing my mind to think of other things I have succeeded in freeing myself from the shadow. That is why I have told no one, not even you. That is why I do not like to bring it back again."

"But I don't see what all this has to do with the portrait," Maxey said wonderingly.

"I will tell you, Julian. It was in one of those waking nightmares that I saw that face. Don't make me tell it, Julian! Don't make me tell it!"

"God knows I would do nothing to cause my little wife a moment's uneasiness; but, darling, it is so important to our welfare—for yours and mine—that you should speak. Let it be recalled once and then forgotten for all time. In one of those dreams you saw that face?"

She answered him in a low voice:

"Yes, Julian. I was lying on the bed there, in the alcove room. Something, I don't know what to call it, came over me. It was more like a waking dream than anything I could name. My eyes were wide open all the time. I saw the room and the things in it, just as now."

She clung closer to her husband and went on:

"I was lying there in the alcove room looking toward the fireplace out there. It was just after I had been brought back here, before I had told you my story. I was watching a fire and coals in the grate. Presently I felt a sinking dreary sensation coming over me. I did not understand it. I was too weak to make any resistance to it. It was in the middle of the day, and the room was full of light. But though the knowledge of that fact never left me I felt that it had suddenly become very dark. All the light seemed to arise from something bursting up into a great flame in the grate, and then between me and the fire, with the strong glare upon it, I saw that face just as I have tried to draw it. I could see the man's arms and shoulders. He seemed to be holding something to the light of the fire and staring at it. But that was dark. All this was dim, but real—as real as you or the room itself—and yet all the time, if you can understand such a thing, I never got the real fire mixed with the fire that was in my mind alone. The grate was still there behind the face and shoulders. It was an apparition, and I knew it. That was what terrified me—not then, for I never thought of fear, but afterward, when somebody came in and disturbed me and I had time to think of it. When that disturbance came, the phantom vanished like a flash. Afterward it came to me in the dead of night and suddenly sprang up out of the darkness. Do you wonder that I was afraid such things might get a hold upon me and tried to banish it?"

"Then, in the name of all that is intelligible, why did you sketch it?"

"Because, Julian, I wanted to make it real. Then if I must think of it at all I could think of it as a picture drawn upon canvas and persuade myself that it was no hobgoblin that was haunting me. Perhaps you cannot understand this feeling, but I tell you truly, after I had materialized that face, it no longer had the same terror for me. Perhaps I ought to have conceived any work, but I never thought of your questioning me. Dr. Lamar frightened me so. How could he ever guess what was in my mind?"

"If you had confided in Lamar, you would have done better," said Maxey excitedly. "He would not only have driven away the ghost, but he would have explained him to your entire satisfaction. Why, Annette, if you should hear Lamar talk, you would be astonished to discover what an entirely simple and scientific affair a ghost is. Let me tell you something to relieve your mind of some of its half-superstitious dread. That face you saw was the face of a real man. He was your evil genius, Annette; he it was who took away your name; he who made your life so solitary and miserable; he who pushed you from the sea road and unwittingly gave you to me; he who followed you even here, while you lay in the alcove room helpless and sick, determined you should die. He came here into this room, and not being familiar with the place mistook in the dark Ellen, who was resting herself on my bed, for you. He choked her to prevent her crying out by pulling the ends of the silk handkerchief which she wore about her neck. Not quite sure even then that it was you, he dragged her to the fireplace and threw in a newspaper to give him light. 'The noise he made had startled you. Sick as you were, you understood in a vague way perhaps that there was danger near you, for we found you sitting up in bed. One moment you were looking into darkness. The next the paper flashed up, and you saw his face, glaring in the first moments of his surprise and alarm at the unfamiliar features of my sister. You photographed that scene on your mind, Annette. You know what a power you have of visualization. You remember how the doctor once questioned you about it, and you found out what a phenomenon you were in that direction. Is it so very strange to you now that that picture should have come up into your mind again when you were weak and nervous?"

The young wife looked at her husband, bewildered and wondering.

"I only dimly understand you, Julian. Had I an evil genius? Who was he? What had I done that he should wish me dead? Julian, you have learned at last the secret of my life. What is it?"

"Tomorrow, darling! Wait till tomorrow."

"Is it best, dear?"

"I think so. Little wife, do you remember the time when you were loath to yield yourself to your love for me, because you felt that in making a union with a nameless girl I was running a terrible risk?"

"Hush, Julian! My heart is in my mouth. That fear has never died. In the midst of all my happiness I have never been strong enough to lift that weight. Oh, I thought some day we may be sitting here blindly happy in our ignorance and the truth will come! If it is as I fear it may be, will Julian feel still that his course was wise? Will he love me quite as much, quite as dearly as before? Will there be no shadow of regret in his heart? Oh, my husband, if I could believe there would be, I should be so miserable!"

Julian gathered her to his heart and kissed her with reckless freedom.

"Tomorrow, little wife, tomorrow, you shall know what a fool I have made of myself!"

"Lamar, I believe you are a wizard."

"Why?"

"How do you arrive at your conclusions? It is almost too strange for belief. What possessed you to question my wife so closely the other day about the origin of that portrait?"

"Can't you guess? Had you forgotten?"

"I don't understand you."

"No? Do you recollect the description given by the janitor of the mysterious lady man whose anxiety for your welfare after Annette was brought here was sufficient to get him to the door, but was never by any possibility strong enough to induce him to mount the stairs? Don't you remember the janitor's description—middle aged, smooth face, small eyes near together, bushy eyebrows, hooked nose and the rest? Maxey, I had been keeping my eye open for such a looking individual ever since. Is there anything very remarkable about my analysis of the ghost?"

"Well, I should never have thought of it. You are the most modest man. I suppose you will also claim that there was nothing remarkable about your analysis of the ghost?"

"Oh, yes, I shall. That is different; that is scientific. In that matter I am apt to be vain. Maxey, if you will carry your memory back to a conversation we had many months ago, you will find me by recollecting that I almost predicted the result of your wife's power of visualization. After the experiment of Dr. Benly and myself with the cat—or rather the accident we witnessed, for it was no plan of ours—and I became convinced that she really had a remarkable unconscious power of retaining in her mind the image of anything that impressed her, I thought a good deal about it, and I distinctly recollect telling you, when you were expressing some very callow views regarding the possibility of her remembering events occurring during her illness, if she recovered her mind—I distinctly recollect telling you then that if she ever got well she would have absolutely no memory of that time, but that it would be perfectly possible for her to carry a scene into the future; that, for instance, I should not be overwhelmed with surprise if, though she could remember neither of us, she should paint your picture or mine as an idea of her own. No; there is nothing at all mysterious in this affair. It is presumable, and it actually happened. By induction and deduction both we have demonstrated it, and even in science that is a rare thing, my boy!"

"What a great thing is your science!" cried Maxey. "It dissects a ghost as if it were a monkey's body and makes of a grim and ghastly apparition the most natural thing in the world."

Dr. Lamar smiled.

"I am glad to hear you talking sense. Time was when you were a little skeptical. Perhaps if your wife keeps on the way she has begun, affording illustrations of the benefits of science, we shall even make of you an evolutionist one of these days."

Maxey looked serious.

"I shall hardly go as far as that, Enstace, but I am ready to acknowledge that you do many wonderful things."

"And still we are in our infancy. One of these days, my boy, one of these days!"

Truly this man was strangely hopeful and exuberant for one who had just bidden a long farewell to a sweetheart.

[CONTINUED.]

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